National Center for Education Statistics bulletin

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Date: September 1981

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Gainful Employment Among High School Youth

The employment situation of American youth has become of increasing public and governmental concern as the total number of teenagers in our society has grown and as the disparity between the employment rate for youth and for the labor force as a whole has widened. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) has recently published a report[1] that examines the work activity of high school youth and the effects of such experience upon their learning and development.

The report is based upon base-year data collected in "High School and Beyond," NCES's national longitudinal survey of sophomores and seniors in spring 1980.

The major findings of this report are summarized below:

● The Extent of Youth Employment

Gainful employment is prevalent among high school youth. During the week prior to the spring 1980 survey, 63.2 percent of the seniors and 42.1 percent of the sophomores had been employed, i.e., had worked at least 1 hour for pay.

Males were somewhat more likely than females to be employed. Minority youth, blacks in particular, were considerably less likely than whites to be employed.[2] Among seniors, 49 percent of blacks and 60 percent of Hispanics, as compared to 65 percent of whites, were employed. Similar differences also existed among sophomores although the overall employment rates were lower than those of seniors (see table 1). These differences among racial/ethnic groups were still evident even after differences in family income, type of residential community, and region of residence were taken into account (not shown in tables).

High school students in vocational programs had higher employment rates than those in general programs who, in turn, had higher rates than those in college preparatory programs. These differences were particularly evident in the senior year: 68.5 percent of the vocational program students, as compared to 62.2 percent of the general program students and 60.6 percent of college preparatory program students, were employed.

● Time and Wages

Some employed students worked fewer than 5 hours a week, but most spent a rather large amount of time at work. Over 70 percent of the employed seniors worked at least 15 hours a week and 10 percent worked full time, 35 hours or more (see table 2). The average number of hours per week worked by seniors was about 19; 13 for sophomores (not shown in tables).

Males devoted more time to work than did females. Hours of work also varied by ethnic background and the school program in which the student was enrolled. Overall, Hispanic males were most likely to work full time and to have the highest average hours of work, followed by white males, black males, and all females, in that order. Among females, whites spent the least amount of time at work, as measured by average hours per week. Differences in work time by school program might be attributable to varying demands of these programs and the differential importance of present work for future plans. Vocational students had higher average hours of work than other students (not shown in tables).

Among employed students, 61 percent of the sophomores and 24 percent of seniors received wages that were lower than the minimum wage ($3.10 at the time of the survey). Yet the modal wage category in both cohorts was between $3.10 and $3.49, just above the minimum wage (see table 3). However, unemployed students indicated a willingness to work at wages lower than those received by their already employed peers. (A separate NCES bulletin on this topic was released April 10, 1981.)

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1 *Youth Employment During High School* by Dr. Noah Lewin-Epstein of the National Opinion Research Center working under Contract No. 300-78-0208 with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).

2 Group differences cited in the text are all statistically significant at the .01 level.

● Government-Sponsored Work and Training Programs

Government-sponsored programs provided slightly less than 10 percent of the jobs held by high school students, but participation in such jobs differed dramatically by ethnic background and family income. For example, approximately one-quarter of the black seniors held CETA jobs, as compared with only about 5 and 15 percent of the white and Hispanic seniors, respectively. Students from low-income families were particularly likely to have a government-sponsored job (see table 4). It should be noted, however, that between 30 and 50 percent of the students surveyed said that they had not heard of government-sponsored work programs such as CETA, workstudy, and cooperative education.

● Type of Jobs

Teenager employment tends to concentrate in certain entry-level jobs that require low skill and little commitment, especially for sophomores. For half of the sophomore girls, babysitting was the major work activity, followed by food services. For boys, odd jobs such as lawn work was the major work activity. In the senior cohort, store clerk was the modal category for both sexes, The proportion of female students who worked as babysitters was dramatically lower for seniors than for sophomores.

The differences in the type of jobs held by males and females were substantial. Indeed, in only one of the ten categories were the percentages even close (see table 5). Babysitting, food service, and clerical work were almost exclusively performed by females, while males were much more likely to perform odd jobs, farm work, skilled trades, or manual trades. Differences also existed among students of varying school programs with respect to babysitting, farm work, and skilled trades. Vocational students were more likely than other students to have jobs in farm work or skilled trades. It should be noted, however, that a large percentage of students (about 20 percent overall), did not find a suitable description of their jobs in the predesignated list of categories (see table 5).

● Impact of Work on Educational and Other Social Activities

Only a weak relationship was evident between time spent on work and time spent on homework and watching television. Sophomores spent about the same amount of time per week on homework regardless of the amount of time spent at work. In comparison, working seniors, particularly those who worked more than 20 hours a week, spent somewhat less time on homework. Nonworking senior males spent about 4 hours per week on homework, while those who did work spent about 3 hours.

Students who worked more than 20 hours a week spent slightly less time reading than did students who did not work; they tended more often to drive or ride around for pleasure. No differences were found with respect to such other activities as reading the front page of the newspaper, talking with parents, spending time alone, talking with friends on the phone, or visiting with friends.

● Additional Information

Copies of this report are available from the Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC). The report utilizes data collected in NCES's longitudinal study of high school students, entitled High School and Beyond (HS&B). Additional information about the report and about HS&B is available from Samuel S. Peng, National Center for Education Statistics, 420 Presidential Building, 400 Maryland Avenue SW., Washington, D. C. 20202, telephone (301) 436-6688.

Information about the Center's statistical program and a catalog of NCES publications may be obtained from the Statistical Information Office, National Center for Education Statistics, 1001 Presidential Building, 400 Maryland Avenue SW., Washington, D.C. 20202, telephone (301)436-7900.

Inquiries about availability of related computer tapes should be directed to Data Systems Branch, National Center for Education Statistics, 1001 Presidential Building, 400 Maryland Avenue SW., Washington, D.C. 20202, telephone (301) 436-7944.

The following tables offer the supporting data for this bulletin.

Table 1.--Percent of seniors and sophomores who were employed, by major background characteristics: Spring 1980

Characteristic	Percent who were employed		Sample size	
	Seniors	Sophomores	Seniors	Sophomores
All students .	63.2	42.1	28,240	30,030
Sex:				
Male	65.5	44.3	12,907	13,382
Female	61.1	40.0	14,086	14,511
Race/ethnicity:				
Black	48.7	28.5	3,775	4,064
Hispanic	59.8	35.5	3,177	3,521
White	65.2	44.4	19,852	20,815
High school program:				
Vocational	68.5	44.3	6,959	5,999
General	62.2	42.5	10,293	13,417
Academic	60.6	40.5	10,532	9,941
Family income:				
Less than $12,000 .	58.8	38.4	4,880	5,145
$12,000 to $20,000.	64.1	42.5	8,282	9,051
More than $20,000 .	64.4	43.5	11,353	10,489

NOTES.-1. Detailed subsample sizes may not add to total sample sizes because of missing data or the exclusion of certain subgroups.

2. The standard error (s e) or a percentage (p) can be approximated by the following formula: $s\,e\,(p) = D\,[p(100-p)/n]^{1/2}$, where n is the sample size, and D is a correction factor estimated to be 1.6. The standard error of the difference between two subpopulation percentages (d) can be approximated by taking the square root of the sum of the squares of the standard errors for P_1 and P_2. That is, $s\,e\,(d) = [s\,e(p_1)^2 + s\,e\,(p_2)^2]^{1/2}$. The above approximations generally are conservative.

Table 2.--Percentage distributions of hours worked per week: Employed students, Spring 1980

Hours per week	Seniors	Sophomores
Total	100.0	100.0
1-4	8.2	30.8
5-14	20.7	32.9
15-21	32.9	17.5
22-29	20.4	8.4
30-34	8.2	4.0
35 or more	9.6	6.4
Sample size	17,302	12,236

NOTE.-Estimation of standard errors of percentages is described in footnote 2 of table 1.

Table 3.--Percentage distribution of hourly wages of employed students: Spring 1980

Hourly wages	Seniors	Sophomores
Total	100.0	100.0
Less than $1.50	3.0	20.3
$1.50-$1.99	2.4	10.2
$2.00-$2.49	4.0	10.0
$2.50-$2.89	4.7	8.6
$2.90-$3.09	9.9	11.5
$3.10-$3.49	51.0	24.3
$3.50-$3.99	11.7	4.9
$4.00 or more	13.3	10.2
Sample size	17,302	12,236

NOTE.--Estimation of standard errors of percentages is described in footnote 2 of table 1.

Table 4.--Percent of students participating in government-sponsored work programs, by major background characteristics: Spring 1980

Characteristics	Type of program					
	Cooperative education		Workstudy		CETA	
	Senior	Sophomore	Senior	Sophomore	Senior	Sophomore
All students ...	10.4	2.6	13.0	4.7	8.5	5.9
Sex:						
Male	10.5	3.4	13.6	6.4	8.6	6.7
Female	10.2	1.9	12.5	3.1	8.4	5.1
Race/ethnicity:						
Black	12.6	3.6	15.7	6.6	26.0	16.0
Hispanic	11.4	2.9	15.3	5.4	14.7	10.1
White	9.7	2.4	12.3	4.4	5.4	3.7
High school program:						
Vocational	21.4	5.4	24.1	9.1	11.5	8.4
General	9.6	2.3	13.0	4.5	9.7	6.2
Academic	4.3	1.4	6.4	2.5	6.0	4.4
Family income:						
Less than $12,000 .	12.5	3.0	16.0	5.7	21.0	13.4
$12,000 to $20,000.	10.5	2.6	13.8	4.9	7.6	4.9
More than $20,000 .	9.2	2.4	11.1	3.9	4.5	3.0

NOTE.--1. Sample sizes for seniors and sophomores by subpopulation are shown in table 1.
2. Estimation of standard errors of percentages is described in footnote 2 of table 1.

Table 5.--Percentage distribution of types of jobs held by students, by grade, level, and sex: Spring 1980

Type of Job	Seniors		Sophomores	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Odd jobs	3.1	0.7	14.1	2.1
Food service	11.5	22.1	9.9	14.1
Babysitting	0.5	8.8	2.7	50.3
Farm work	7.0	0.9	11.4	1.7
Factory work	5.3	1.5	2.3	0.5
Skilled trade	11.3	1.1	6.6	0.7
Manual trade	13.6	1.7	12.7	1.9
Store clerk	18.1	25.0	7.6	6.7
Clerical work	2.1	17.5	1.1	4.3
Health-related	2.0	6.0	0.8	1.8
Other	25.5	14.5	30.3	15.0
Sample size	8,323	8,373	5,825	5,644

NOTE.-1. Detailed percentages may not add to 100.0 because of rounding.

2. Estimation of standard error of percentages is described in footnote 2 of table 1.